

I. RESEARCH ARTICLES

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*SMALL, BLACK, AND ROUND,
AND YET IT CAN PINCH ANYONE.
ON PIEPRZ ‘PEPPER’ AND PIEPRZENIE,
LIT. ‘PEPPERING’, IN THE FOLK
AND COLLOQUIAL VARIETIES OF POLISH**

Abstract. The first part of the article is devoted to a reconstruction, by means of the cognitive definition, of the linguacultural view of *pieprz* ‘pepper’ in Polish folk culture. The rich body of 19th and 20th-c. data comes from the files of the *Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols* (text of folklore in a variety of genres, records of beliefs and cultural practices) as well as from dictionaries of the Polish language (general, dialectal, phraseological, and etymological). *Pieprz* is encoded in language not only as a hot and bitter spice, formerly expensive and much desired, but also as a substance with several applications in medicine and magic. Because of its sharp taste, *pieprz* also connotes such features as ‘malice’, ‘offense’, ‘indecentcy’, ‘vulgarity/coarseness’, ‘destruction’, or ‘stupidity’. This is particularly conspicuous in the semantics of its many derivatives, mainly verbs that now belong to the “canon” of Polish expletives and vulgarisms, such as *pieprzyć* ‘talk bullshit’ or ‘screw’, *spieprzyć* ‘screw up’, *zapieprzyć* ‘steal’, *wypieprzyć* ‘dump’, etc. These are in focus in the second part of the article, where it is investigated how they are related to the Polish linguacultural stereotype of pepper.

KEY WORDS: plants; Polish folk culture; cognitive definition; vulgarisms; expletives

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A forthcoming volume of the Dictionary of Folk Stereotypes and Symbols (SSiSL) will be devoted to plants. The editor of the publication, Jerzy Bartmiński, points to the special status of that volume, due to the role that plants play in Polish folk culture:

This volume is particularly important for an agricultural society, which the Polish society is from the historical perspective – the rural, folk tradition, associated with land cultivation and nature, is an important and still living aspect of Polish national culture and heritage. [...] Linguacultural views of plants are important components of the Polish cultural *imaginarium*, sustained by song and fairy tale folklore, national literature, visual art, colloquial phraseology. The planned volume will be an important supplement and synthesis of previous research in the field of linguistics, ethnography, ethnobotany, which has already yielded detailed studies, although only covering selected aspects of plants. (Bartmiński 2013: 2, 27)¹

Six parts of the volume will appear, devoted to cereals (part 1), crops, vegetables, and spices (part 2), herbs and flowers (part 3), shrubs and dwarf shrubs (part 4), trees (part 5), and fungi, weeds, and plant clusters (part 6). In part 2, spice plants will include: black cumin, mustard, caraway, dill, marjoram, saffron and pepper, the latter of which is the subject of this article.

Although pepper is commonly known and used today, it does not seem to be a typical folk plant or spice. It does not occur in rural gardens or meadows and hardly anyone knows where and how it grows, as in the collocations: *zwiąć/uciec/umknąć/zbiec/wynieść się/pojechać/zapędzić kogoś/pokazać komuś/... gdzie pieprz rośnie*, lit. ‘run away/move away/travel/chase someone/show someone/... where pepper grows’, i.e. ‘in exotic countries; far away, as far as possible’ (S SFr 1/669, NKPP pieprz 3a-p). Therefore, in the everyday awareness of Poles (not only country dwellers) pepper is categorised mainly as a spice (formerly: *korzeń*, lit. ‘root’; Karł SJP 2/485), rather than a plant, as reflected in this definition: “*Pieprz* is a kitchen spice in the form of a black or beige powder with a spicy taste; also: small dried fruits that can be ground to obtain this powder; also: a plant from whose fruit pepper is obtained” (Bań InSJP). Other dictionaries refer to scientific knowledge and in the first place define pepper as a plant, e.g. “a herbaceous plant or a shrub belonging to the pepper family (Piperaceae) that comprises about 700 species in tropical and subtropical areas of both hemispheres; fruit in the form of dried berries is one of the oldest spices” (Zgół PSWP); “a plant with small flowers collected in inflorescences, growing in a warm climate, cultivated for its fruit with a pungent taste, which after drying is used as a spice; a spice obtained from dried pepper fruit” (Żmig WSJP).

¹ All translations from non-English sources, unless stated otherwise, by Agnieszka Gicala. [trans. note]

The field of plants is fuzzy and the differences between various classifications (scientific, colloquial, and popular) are addressed by Bartmiński and Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska thus:

The description of the plant world in the second volume of SSiSL now being prepared in accordance with its already implemented general conception, will correspond to the model that functions in colloquial Polish rather than in scientific Polish, either botanical or non-specialist. [...] The adoption of the colloquial rather than the scientific categorisation of plants as the basis of SSiSL means that the boundaries of the field of plants will remain largely conventional, and the problem of plant categorical boundaries becomes suspended. The criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from the description will be the cultural relevance of individual plants, understood as their practical and/or symbolic significance (knowledge, use, application) in the area of folk culture, judged from the subjective perspective of a participant in that culture, rather than their theoretical significance, judged from the viewpoint of an external observer. The folk categorisation of plants cannot be a reflection of their scientific classification, subordinated to the requirements of traditional logic, as they have different starting points, are set from different perspectives and serve different needs. (Bartmiński and Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2013: 56–57)

Despite the fact that *pieprz* as a plant is unknown in Polish folk culture, *pieprz* as a spice has a stable place in it and meets the criterion of cultural relevance. Therefore, only a description of pepper as a spice will be included in the relevant volume of SSiSL.²

The past presence of pepper in the Polish cuisine, including its rural variants, was noted, among others, by Zygmunt Gloger, who even dedicated to it a separate entry in his *Encyclopaedia of the Old Polish Period*:

In the Polish cuisine of the past, pepper was a very important spice: Poles liked to eat greasy and spicy, peppery food. Before trade with India had been established, pepper was a very expensive product and was therefore sometimes used instead of money to pay penalties. For example, in the privilege granted to Jews in the 13th c., it was stated that people who throw stones at a Jewish school should pay fines with pepper. This balance between pepper and money dated back to the Roman times in Europe.³ To this day, among simple folk, vodka with pepper is considered a rather peculiar remedy for the stomach. What former Poles liked, they recommended to their daughters in the proverb:

² The same applies to saffron, which is as exotic for Poles as pepper. Cumin or mustard will be described in SSiSL both as plants and spices.

³ In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder expresses his amazement over the popularity of pepper: "It is quite surprising that the use of pepper has come so much into fashion, seeing that in other substances which we use, it is sometimes their sweetness, and sometimes their appearance that has attracted our notice; whereas, pepper has nothing in it that can plead as a recommendation to either fruit or berry, its only desirable quality being a certain pungency; and yet it is for this that we import it all the way from India! Who was the first to make trial of it as an article of food? and who, I wonder, was the man that was not content to prepare himself by hunger only for the satisfying of a greedy appetite? Both pepper and ginger grow wild in their respective countries, and yet here we buy them by weight – just as if they were so much gold or silver." (Pliny (the Elder) 1855: 112–113)

Pieprzo i szafranno, moja mościa panno (“Do not economize on pepper and saffron, my dear lady”). (Gloger 1903: 9–10)

Gloger mentions vodka with pepper used as a “rather peculiar” healing agent “among simple folk”. The old folk applications of pepper are, however, much richer, which is confirmed by materials collected in the SSiSL archives (mainly from the 19th and 20th c.). Those include texts of folklore (riddles, proverbs, various song genres, fairy tales, anecdotes), records of beliefs, and descriptions of folk practices (nutritional, magical, medicinal). Analysed together with the so-called systemic data, excerpted from dictionaries of the Polish language (general, dialectal, phraseological, etymological), they allow for a full reconstruction of the folk linguacultural view of pepper. The reconstruction will be performed with the use of the cognitive definition (Bartmiński 1988), applied, among others, in SSiSL:

In this dictionary, explications are based on the principles of the cognitive definition: they are *sui generis* texts of culture, narratives about an object, constructed from the point of view of a typical representative of the language community being described. The components of the cognitive definition (explication) include stereotypical (standard) motifs that carry with them a common judgment about an object and have more or less established linguistic exponents. (Bartmiński 2012: 8)

In SSiSL, the entry PIEPRZ will consist of two parts: explicative and documentary, connected by a system of numerical cross-references, thanks to which the characteristics invoked in the explication will be supported by contextual evidence in the documentation. For the purposes of this article, however, these parts are being combined: fragments of texts and references to specific sources are placed directly in the explication.

Pieprz ‘pepper’

Names. In contemporary Polish, the name *pieprz* (bot. usually *pieprz czarny* ‘black pepper’, *Piper nigrum* L.) has been preserved but another Old Polish term was *pierz* (SP XVI 24/133, SStp Urb 6/99). Sometimes in dialects another term can be found: *corny korzyń*, lit. ‘black root’ (Kąs Podh 2/250), more frequent in the plural form *cárne korzynie* (Kąs SGO 1/78).

Pieprz is an all-Slavic name (cf. Russian *pérec*, Czech *pepř*, Serbian/Chroatian *pāpar*) whose motivation is unknown. It is assumed that it was borrowed from Latin *piper*, which comes from Greek *péperi*, considered to be a loan from Old Indic *pippalī*, probably of the non-Indo-European origin (Bor SE 429).

Categorisations. Pepper is classified among *spices* and the so-called *korzenie*, lit. ‘roots’ (Zar SSioł 57, Pod SGŚ 143, K 83 Przem 1/115), where *korzenie* are “fragrant exotic spices, such as pepper, ginger, nutmeg, etc.” (Karł SJP 2/485); hence *nakorzyniony* ‘peppered or spiced up’ (Pod SGŚ 184). Consider the proverb *What’s up? New spices, old pepper*⁴ (NKPP pieprz 5), and the Old Polish expression *okorzenieć pieprzem/garścią pieprzu* ‘to spice over with pepper/with a handful of pepper’ (SP XVI 24/133).⁵

Complexes and collections. Pepper most often co-occurs with salt, as in the proverb: *A kitchen without pepper and salt is like a barn without corn*⁶ (Sych SGKasz 4/254, also NKPP *pieprzne*). The absence of these two basic spices makes a dish unpalatable, as in the wedding song: *Oh, bad cabbage, bad, unsalted, unpeppered, bad. It will be necessary to entertain the cook so that she can season the cabbage*⁷ (Bart PANLub 2/620), in contrast to a song about a good cook: *She cooked with pepper, she cooked with salt, she earned her reward*⁸ (Glog Pieś 110).

Moreover, pepper is also combined with:

(a) saffron, which is a spice with an equally distinct and refined taste, i.e. *lá panów* ‘for gentlefolk’ (ZWAK 1890/49, also NKPP *pieprzno* 2); a wedding song performed when the dishes are being served, says: *Idą do nas, idą wieści, niosą nam pici i jeści. News is coming that they are bringing us drink and food. It’s with pepper, with saffron and various spices. We send for pepper, we send for saffron to the town of Rybnik*⁹ (Gal Star 107);

(b) pork, i.e. meat seasoned with pepper, because *Where there is pork, there must also be pepper*¹⁰ (Sych SGKasz 4/254); cf. the common tongue twister: *Peter, do not pepper pork with pepper because, Peter, you will overpepper the pork*¹¹ (NKPP Piotr 9, 20);

⁴ *Co nowego? Nowe korzyny, stary pieprz.*

⁵ Cf. the Polish diminutive noun *pieprzyk* ‘spice; the peppery, spicy aroma and flavour of wine’; hence *pieprzykowany* or *pieprzkowaty* ‘(about a flavour), spicy, pungent, like *pieprzyk*’ (Karł SJP 4/154).

⁶ *W kuchni bez pieprzu i sole, to jak bez zbożego w stodole.*

⁷ *“Oj, niedobro kapuścina, niedobro, niesoluno, niepieprzuno, niedobro. Trzeba będzie kuchareczkę zabawić, żeby mogła kapusteczkę przyprawić.*

⁸ *Gotowała pieprzno, gotowała słono, założyła na to, żeby jej co dano.*

⁹ *To z pieprzami, z szafranami i z różnymi przyprawami. My po pieprze, po szafrany do Rybnika posyłamy.*

¹⁰ *Dze je wieprz, tam musi być i pieprz.*

¹¹ *Nie pieprz, Pietrze, wieprza pieprzem, bo przepieprzysz, Pietrze, pieprzem wieprza.* The tongue-twister gave rise to a well-known poem by Jan Brzechwa, beginning with the words: *Nie pieprz Pietrze, pieprzem wieprza, / wtedy szynka będzie lepsza. / Właśnie po to wieprza pieprze, / żeby mięso było lepsze* [Peter, do not pepper pork with pepper, / then the ham will be better./ That is why I’m using pepper: / in this way the meat is better]

(b) fish, as in the proverbs: *As a fish dish needs pepper, so love needs tears*¹² (NKPP miłość 14); or *A wife without a dowry is like a fish dish without pepper*¹³ (NKPP żona 123, also NKPP ryba 35b, NKPP pieprz 4);

(c) vodka, commonly known as *pieprzówka*, to which pepper is added to enhance its taste and strength, which is why in a flirtatious song the girl boasts: *Good, good was that booze with pepper, when I drank it with Joseph under a bush*¹⁴ (Wisła 1900/312), cf. also its therapeutic uses;

(d) wine and *flis* 'rafting', which, according to a proverb, are luxuries, just like pepper: *One who lives according to their nature, can do without pepper, without wine, without rafting*¹⁵ (NKPP żyć 25);

(e) snuff – as a masculine, distinct delicacy; in one of the rite of passage songs a newly married woman is instructed: *Take a basket, go to town, buy pepper and snuff as delicacies for Johnny*¹⁶ (Bart PANLub 5/194).

Opposites. Sharp, bitter pepper is a frequent opposite of: (a) sweet products, i.e. sugar: *It often is like sugar today and like pepper tomorrow*¹⁷ (NKPP dziś, dzisiejszy 3) and honey: *In this world, things intermingle in strange ways: sometimes pepper with honey, and sweet with sour*¹⁸ (NKPP świat 113f); (b) fragrant pomade: *Fit for advice like pepper for pomade or Fit for a parade like pepper for pomade*¹⁹ (NKPP rada 13b); (c) fine-grained and mild-flavoured poppy: *A grain of pepper has more power than a handful of poppy seeds*²⁰ (NKPP pieprz 7); *Eat a quart of pepper, count a quart of poppy* is a statement of impossibility (NKPP pieprz 14); in a story, before the battle of Vienna in 1683, Kara Mustafa, the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, had sent the Polish king John III Sobieski a quart of poppy seeds to show that he had so many soldiers – *And Sobieski wrote back that it was true that he himself had a smaller army but sent him a quart of pepper to taste one grain to see what it was like*²¹ (Kad Ciesz 216).

Appearance and properties. The appearance and properties of pepper are aptly described in riddles: *Small, black, and round, and yet it can*

(Brzechwa 1938: 4, 5).

¹² *Jak do ryby pieprzu, tak do miłości też potrzeba.*

¹³ *Żona bez posagu, ryba bez pieprzu.*

¹⁴ *Dobra była, dobra, gorzałeczka z pieprzem, jakiem ją pijała z Józinkiem pode krzem.*

¹⁵ *Kto wedle natury swej żyje przepisu, obejdzie się bez pieprzu, bez wina, bez flisu.*

¹⁶ *Weź se koszyk, idź do miasta, kup se pieprzu i tabaki, Jasieńkowi na przysmaki.*

¹⁷ *Często dziś jak cukier, a jutro jak pieprz.*

¹⁸ *Na tym świecie dziwnie się plecie, pieprz z miodem czasem, a słodycz z kwasem.*

¹⁹ *Zdatny do rady jak pieprz do pomady. / Dobry do parady jak pieprz do pomady.*

²⁰ *Więcej ma ziarno pieprzu mocy niż garść maku.*

²¹ *A Sobieski mu zaś napisał tak: że je prawda, że łun ma miyni wojska, a posłot mu kwartym pieprza. Ale że skosztuje jedno zorko, jaki jest.*

*pinch anyone?*²² (Sych SKoc 3/47), *Black, tiny, always at the king's dinner*²³ (Wisła 1890/13).

The small spherical shape of pepper is also recorded in a wedding song: the girl is getting married to a *goldfinch that has balls like two peppers, and that thing like a small needle*²⁴ (Bart PANLub 2/545), cf. also *pieprzniczka* 'pepper pot' used in reference to a girl with a small face (SGP PAN/K) or the saying *mysie łajno za pieprz sprzedać* 'to sell mouse droppings as pepper' (NKPP *sprzedać* 4). Moreover, the black/black-brown colour of pepper is preserved in the word *pieprzyk* 'mole', i.e. a small brown spot on the skin. In addition, pepper is dry, hence the phrases: *suchy jak pieprz* 'as dry as pepper', *wysuszyć coś na pieprz* 'to dry something to pepper', *coś wyschło na pieprz* 'something dried up to pepper' (Zgół PSWP 28/285), cf. *the corn is as dry as pepper, it can be collected from the field*²⁵ (SGP PAN/K).

A very characteristic feature of pepper is its sharp (Kąś Podh 2/467) and bitter taste (NKPP *gorzki* 5). Pepper *pali* 'burns' (Sim Księg 48), *scypie* 'stings' (Kąś SGO 2/29), *ma moc* 'has power' (NKPP *pieprz* 7); cf. the expressions: *miły jak pieprz na języku* 'as nice as pepper on the tongue' (NKPP *miły* 16), *jakby pieprz gryzł* 'feels like biting pepper' (NKPP *pieprz* 5), which is why it is used in small quantities, such as *scypła* 'a pinch' (Kąś SGO 2/300).

Due to the intense sharp and bitter taste of the spice, the word *pieprz* has also developed metaphorical meanings, such as 'bitterness', 'acrimony', 'satire', 'malice' (Karł SJP 4/153), hence the expressions: *dodać do czegoś pieprzu/pieprzyka* 'add pepper to something', i.e. 'add sharpness, biting or irritating wit' (S SFr 1/670); *anegdota/historia/dowcip z pieprzykiem* 'a peppered anecdote/story/joke', i.e. 'one with a frivolous, obscene allusion, an ambiguous punchline' (Zgół PSWP 28/291). The meanings of numerous derivatives of *pieprz* are constructed in a similar way: they are usually satirical, offensive, indecent, or vulgar, and so mainly occur in speech, e.g. the adjective *pieprzny* 'peppery', i.e. 'incompatible with good manners, offending the principles of decency'; *pieprznięty* 'peppered', i.e. 'about a person: one who behaves foolishly, is stupid, mentally disturbed, or is deemed to be like that'; the verb *pieprzyć* 'to pepper' means 'to talk nonsense or to tell lies', 'about a man: to screw, to have sex', 'to treat someone or something with contempt, to express disrespect or hostility, not to be interested in', 'to do something in a bad or careless way' (Zgół PSWP 28/286–291); the

²² *Małe, czarne, okrągłe, a każdego wiszczipie?*

²³ *Czarnieńkie, maleńkie, u króla na obiedzie zawsze.*

²⁴ *takiego szczygielka, co ma jajka jak dwa pieprze, tamto jak igielka*

²⁵ *Zboze suche jak pieprz, można zwozić.*

verb *przypieprzyć* means 'to hit somebody or something' (Zgół PSWP 34/310); *opieprzyć* means 'to scold someone for something' (Zgół PSWP 26/331); *podpieprzyć* means 'to steal, take something from someone' (Zgół PSWP 29/393); *wypieprzyć* means 'to throw away, get rid of someone or something' (Zgół PSWP 48/302–303); *spieprzyć* means 'to run away quickly from someone or something', 'to spoil something, to do something badly' (Zgół PSWP 39/430, and other sources).

Origin. Pepper does not grow in Poland, it is imported from abroad, according to common beliefs from a very distant place, hence the expressions: *zwiąć/uciec/umknąć/zbiec/wynieść się/pojechać/zapędzić kogoś/pokazać komuś/... gdzie pieprz rośnie* 'to escape/flee/run away/go away/travel/drive someone/show someone/... where pepper grows', i.e. 'to exotic countries, as far as possible' (S SFr 1/669, NKPP *pieprz* 3a-p); consider: *Do you know where it grows? That pepper? Well, then run away [spchieprzaj] there for it is not here,*²⁶ or *Run away [spchieprzaj] where pepper grows*²⁷ (Rog Wag 299). According to beliefs, it grows in hot countries (Święt Nadr 588); according to fairy tales, it grows in France (K 7 Krak 98) or one can buy it in *Amsterdam* (Lom Baj 160), while a proverb says: *Pepper has been brought by the Wieprz river*²⁸ (NKPP *Wieprz* (rzeka)).

Purchase and price of pepper. Pepper was formerly bought *in town* (K 6 Krak 181, NKPP Gdańsk 25), *in the spice store* (Karl SJP 4/153), as in the expression *pieprz sprzedawać* 'to sell pepper', 'to trade spices' (Zdan SJP 997). It was bought from a street vendor (Gal Star 107) or from a Jew: *Jews used to walk around the town with bags. They bought leather or sold pepper, that's what they did*²⁹ (Rog Wag 299), hence the expression *kupczq sądami jak Żydzi pieprzem* 'they trade court sentences like Jews trade pepper' (NKPP sąd 5).

As pepper had to be brought from abroad, it was once expensive and not accessible to everyone, so in a riddle it is served *at the king's dinner* (Wisła 1890/13); in a song, a meal *could be expensive because there was pepper*³⁰ (K 6 Krak 194); an old Polish saying *Do not economise on pepper and saffron, my dear lady*³¹ meant 'do it in a wealthy manner' (NKPP *pieprzno* 2); there are also expressions like *drogi jak pieprz* 'as expensive as pepper' (NKPP *drogi* 4), *zapłacić/przedać coś z pieprzem i solą* 'to pay/sell

²⁶ *A wiesz, gdzie on rośnie? Ten pchieprz? No to tam spchieprzaj, bo tutaj go ni ma.*

²⁷ *Spchieprzaj tam gdzie pchieprz rośnie.*

²⁸ *Pieprz przyniósł Wieprz.*

²⁹ *Kiedyś to Żydy latali z workamy. To skory kupali, to z pchieprzamy, z temy tam chodzili.*

³⁰ *Bywało drogo, bo z pieprzem.*

³¹ *Pieprzno i szafranno, moja mościa panno.*

something with pepper and salt', i.e. 'to pay a lot, overpay' (NKPP płacić 29, NKPP sprzedać 8); *pieprzny* 'peppery', when used about a price, meant 'too high, exorbitant', hence *pieprzyć* 'to charge a high price' (Karł SJP 4/153–154). Due to its cost, pepper doubled as a currency, hence *pieprzowe* 'peppery' referred to 'a charge in the form of pepper instead of tribute' (SP XVI 24/86).³²

Processing. Before eating, one can *tluc* 'pestle' pepper (hence the expression *stłuc na pieprz* 'to pestle to pepper', NKPP *pieprz* 12), *trzeć* or *mleć* 'mill, grind' pepper to powder (older *pieprz mielony/miałki* 'ground pepper', SP XVI 24/133), although a proverb says: *Pepper can't be ground, a woman can't be persuaded*³³ (NKPP baba 70). Pepper used to be pestled in mortars, usually wooden ones, called *tartka* (Glog Tyk 90), *tárko* (Święt Nadr 42), *tareczka* (K 26 Maz 44); today it is usually ground in grinders or bought ground.

Storage. Pepper is stored in *pieprznica*, *pieprzniczka* 'pepper pot' (SJP 4/153); according to a song, at a good feast there should be *pieprzniczka z pieprzem* 'a pepper pot with pepper' and *rożek z tabaką* 'a cone with snuff' (Bart PANLub 3/139).

Pepper as a spice. Due to its distinctive taste, pepper is – next to salt – the basic and commonly used seasoning for dishes: *Peppery and salty food flies into the throat like mad*³⁴ (NKPP *pieprzne*). Pepper is added to meat: *When we kill a pig and make various kinds of food from it, we ask the uncle to put a lot of pepper into brown and blood sausage because we enjoy eating peppery food*³⁵ (Kaś SGO 2/30), to *twaróg* 'cottage cheese made from cow milk' (Karw Dobrz 133), to *bryndza* 'cottage cheese made from sheep's milk' (Gaj Rozw 52), soups, such as borsch (Karw Dobrz 130), broth (Lud 1954/715), potato soup (K 11 Poz 126), or when added to sauerkraut: *Now we will go to press it in the barrel, add salt, pepper, onion, and we will add dill, laurel leaves, pepper and caraway seeds, beetroots and apples, so that it ferments better, and we will add horseradish, and the cabbage must be hard so as to make it taste stronger*³⁶ (SGO 1/25). In the past, pepper

³² In medieval England, it was possible to pay rent with black pepper (the so-called *peppercorn rent*). Currently *peppercorn rent* means a very low, symbolic rent because pepper has become a cheap spice (Bruce 2007).

³³ *Pieprzu nie przetrze, baby nie przeprze.*

³⁴ *Pieprzne a stöne leci w gardło kiej szalone.*

³⁵ *Kie zabijymie świnię i robijymie choć jakie wyroby, to wdę kazujymie ujkowi wsypać duzo pieprzu do salcesonu i kiski, bo radzi jymie pieprzne rzeczy.*

³⁶ *Do becki teraz pudzieme jo tłocyć, nasolić, napeprzyć, nacebulić, i da sie kuper, bobkowe listy, peprz i kminu esce, ćwikły i jabka, coby kista lepijy, aji krzánu dawajo, twarda kapusta coby była zaś, coby miała chuć.*

sometimes replaced fat, especially during Lent: *During Lent, onion, garlic, pepper were used instead of fat*³⁷ (SGP PAN/K); *During Lent, a pinch of caraway, a pinch of pepper were added to soup instead of fat*³⁸ (Kąś SGO 2/29); *pieprzówka* is 'water boiled with pepper, onion and laurel leaves', used as an additive for potatoes in the absence of anything better (SGP PAN/K). Ground pepper is added to the kind of vodka called *pieprzówka* (common usage).

Pepper was sometimes used to season ritual bread, such as *korovai* (K 83 Przem 1/115), *kołacz* 'oilcake' (K 73 Krak 1/11); for Christmas it was added to *orzechy* (lit. 'nuts'), i.e. 'round cookies made from grated carrots, honey, flour and pepper' (Kuk Kasz 166), *fafernuchy* (from German *Pfefferkuchen*), also known as *nowelatki*, i.e. 'small and hard honey cookies with an addition of nuts and pepper, often in animal shapes' (Kom PAE 3/59). Grains of pepper also had an ornamental function, e.g. the Easter lamb was made of butter and had eyes made of pepper (MAAE 1919/39). The name *piernik* 'cake with honey and spices', also comes from *pieprz*, from *pierzny* (in Old Polish) and *pierny* (from the 16th to the 18th c., and today in dialects) 'peppery, seasoned with pepper' (Bor SE 430), 'well seasoned with pepper', metaphorically 'fat, immodest, indecent, piquant, lewd, pornographic'; cf. *pieprznik* 'a kind of peppery *piernik*' (Karł SJP 4/153).

Pepper is not given to farm animals, hence numerous phraseologisms, e.g. *znać się na czymś jak świnia/koza/gęś/kura/... na pieprzu* 'to know something as well as a pig/goat/goose/chicken... knows pepper' (NKPP znać 21a).

The effects of eating pepper. After eating the spicy pepper:

(a) the mouth *pali* 'burns' (Sim Księg 48), *szczypie* 'stings, burns' (Kąś SGO 2/29), and one is thirsty: *One who eats peppery food, wants to drink*³⁹ (NKPP *pieprzno* 1); in some households, people avoided eating pepper on Christmas Eve, otherwise *the whole year would be bitter and burning like pepper*⁴⁰ (a belief from the area of Pińczów in south-central Poland; ZWAK 1885/3);

(b) the nose is irritated, which leads to sneezing: *I pestled some pepper and sneezed a lot*⁴¹ (Wiet SPog 98), as in the expression *natarł mu pieprzu w nos* 'he rubbed some pepper into someone's nose' (NKPP *pieprz* 1); Old

³⁷ *Wielki Post jak przysiet to była okrasa cebula, czosnek, pieprz.*

³⁸ *W poście to tam ciśli do polywki scypie kminu, scypie pieprzu i taká było omasta.*

³⁹ *Kto pierno/pieprzno jada, chce pić.*

⁴⁰ *Cały rok był gorzki i palący jak pieprz.*

⁴¹ *Natługyn pieprzu, a com się przy tym nakichoł.*

Polish *Some people make themselves sneeze by putting pepper powder into their nose*⁴² (SP XVI 24/86);

(c) pepper warms, stimulates a person (often excessively) and may cause anxiety, irritability, anger, as in the proverb *Pepper puts a man on horseback and a woman into the grave*⁴³ (NKPP pieprz 10); in a love song, the girl would put some pepper into the ungrateful suitor's food so that he *flew in the air* (*leciał na powietrzu*) (K 41 Maz 173); cf. numerous phraseologisms: *lata jak z pieprzem*, lit. '(one) flies as if with pepper' (NKPP lecieć 23), *jakby mu kto pieprzu nasypał* 'as if one was given pepper; restlessly' (S SFr 1/670), *trza mu pieprzu pod ogon* 'one needs pepper under his tail', i.e. 'one needs stimulation, encouragement, warming up' (NKPP pieprz 13), *bęc pieprzem obsęponi* 'to be sprinkled with pepper', i.e. 'to be angry' (Sych SGKasz 4/254), *natrzeć/dać/nadać/zadać pieprzu* 'to rub/give pepper', i.e. 'to annoy' (NKPP pieprz 1ab); in dialects: *pieprznik* is 'a fidget' because *kryñci się jakby miał pieprz w dupie* 'he fidgets as if he had pepper in the ass' (Tomasz Łop 176).

Magical uses. Pepper was sometimes thought to have magical properties. It was believed, for example, that if a person *bites two [black] mustard seeds and two grains of pepper on an empty stomach, then on that day they do not need to be afraid of sudden death*⁴⁴ (ZWAK 1895/23); a witch was believed to be able to bring "tempestuous hail" by sowing one field with salt and another with pepper (K 48 Ta-Rz 273); in order to sell the livestock quickly and well, it was advised to spill powdered pepper all over the animal being sold and *bedo śli kupce jak po pieprz* 'buyers will crowd as if to buy pepper' (Dwor Maz 197); in order to make a dog aggressive, it was given a few grains of pepper on Christmas Day (MAAE 1914/61); when someone did not want their neighbour's male goose to get into their yard, they would give it a few grains of pepper on Christmas Day (MAAE 1914/60).

Medicinal uses. Pepper also found wide application in medicine. It was believed that pepper *strengthens the stomach and adds strength*⁴⁵ (Wisła 1894/141); *when added to food, it ensures good digestion in the stomach*⁴⁶ (SP XVI 24/133). For stomach ache, people drank vodka with pestled pepper or whole pepper grains (K 17 Lub 164), vodka with pepper, peppermint and sometimes with centaury (Lud 1900/59), vodka with ash and pepper

⁴² *Niekthorzy sobie kichającą czynią sypać w nos proch pieprzowy.*

⁴³ *Pieprz mężczyznę na konia wysadza, a kobietę do grobu sprowadza.*

⁴⁴ ... zgryzie dwie ziarnce gorczyce [czarnej] a dwie ziarnce pieprzu na czczo, tedy onego dnia nie trzeba mu się bać nagłej śmierci.

⁴⁵ *Wzmacnia żołądek, sił dodaje.*

⁴⁶ *W karmiach pożywany czyni dobre trawienie żołądkowi.*

(Wisła 1900/770), chamomile and strong *okowita* ‘very strong spirit’ with pepper (ZWAK 1890/198); people also ground pepper and drank it with rum, and then crunched on sugar (MAAE 1896/425). Colic was treated using tobacco compresses onto which *okowita* was poured and pepper was sprinkled (MAAE 1914/73). The recommended treatment for diarrhoea was *various kinds of vodka with herbs, pepper and ginger*⁴⁷ (Wisła 1892/914); one could also *eat eggs, boiled hard and sprinkled with pepper*⁴⁸ (Udz Med 162). Against parasites, children were given cabbage stock or pepper vodka (K-51 Sa-Kr 17), or a pepper infusion with milk (Pal Roś 146).

To treat pannus, pepper was bitten and then the sick eye was breathed upon (MAAE 1903/256).

An aching, rotten tooth was treated by filling it with a crushed grain of pepper (Wisła 1892/915), or pepper powder, salt or alum (ZWAK 1890/199), by covering it with a dry plum with pepper (Lud 1900/60), an onion hollowed out and baked with nine grains of pepper (Udz Med 149), a compress of chopped garlic, mixed with gunpowder (or saltpetre), sulphur and pestled pepper (ZWAK 1882/220).

For fever, one grain of pepper was swallowed on the first day of treatment, two grains on the second day and gradually one more each day until it came to nine, after which on the tenth day there was one grain fewer and then the dose was gradually reduced to one (K 51 Sa-Kr 14). The recommended cure for *zimnica* ‘malaria’ was to drink seven grains of white pepper with vodka (K 7 Krak 163), a concoction of pepper and mint on milk (Święt Nadr 632). For a sore throat, the patient was to gargle with a solution of honey, vinegar, mustard seed, pepper, rue, and sage (Święt Nadr 614) or with a boiled mixture of sage, red beet, ginger, pepper, vinegar, and honey (Wisła 1894/355). To ease a cough, bacon fat with pepper was placed on the person’s chest (Wisła 1901/358); for *suchoty* ‘tuberculosis’, suet with pepper and periwinkle was worn constantly on the chest (Wisła 1901/358).

After childbirth, women were given pepper and cinnamon cooked in wine or spirit, which was supposed to cause “faster purification” (Wisła 1891/506). Contractions of the uterus after childbirth (the so-called *gryźła*, *gryźma*, *rźniącka*) were treated by applying to the navel cloth compresses soaked in peppery spirit (Dwor WMaz 29). For delayed menstruation, women would drink a pepper tincture (Pal Roś 146).

Pepper was also used to cure farm animals, e.g. bloat in cattle was treated by *pouring vinegar with pepper, ginger and salt into the animal’s throat, having toppled the animal first, and later running with the animal*

⁴⁷ *Rozmaite wódki z ziołami, pieprzem i imbirem.*

⁴⁸ *Zjeść jaje, ugotowane na twardo i posypane pieprzem.*

held on a rope⁴⁹ (Wisła 1898/296); *paskudnik* ‘film’ on a cow’s eye was sprinkled with pepper (Lud 1931/60); when a goat’s skin was turning dry (*przysychała*), an incision was made in the skin, two grains of pepper were pushed under it, and the whole place was lubricated with *okowita* ‘strong spirit’ (AJiKWiel 10/2/116); for *pypeć* ‘pip, a whitish thickening on the tongue in poultry’, it was advised to collect during the harvest *some field cumin, and put it into their drink along with some slag from the blacksmith or dust from the locksmith; give them some butter mixed with pepper for this ailment*⁵⁰ (Wisła 1898/300).

Equivalences. In idioms, common expressions, and collocations, pepper is used interchangeably with other products that:

(a) are bitter, as in *gorzki jak pieprz* (*hiszpański*) ‘as bitter as (Spanish) pepper’, where *pieprz* is interchangeable with *chmiel* ‘hops’, *piołun* ‘wormwood’, *cykoria* ‘bitter chicory’, *żółć* ‘bile’ (NKPP *gorzki*);

(b) are irritating, as in the ironic *miły jak pieprz na języku* ‘as nice as pepper on the tongue’ (NKPP *miły* 16) or *jak sól w oku* ‘as salt in the eye’ (NKPP *miły* 17);

(c) are dry: *suchy jak pieprz* ‘as dry as pepper’, where *pieprz* is interchangeable with *chrzan* ‘horseradish’, *sól* ‘salt’, *szczapa* ‘firewood’, *patyk* ‘a stick’, *tabaka* ‘snuff’, *wiór* ‘wooden chips’ (NKPP *suchy*);

(d) when given, symbolise teasing, giving someone a hard time: *dać/nadać/zadać/natrzeć pieprzu*, lit. ‘to give/grind pepper’ (NKPP *pieprz* 1), *dać/zadać komu bobu*, lit. ‘to give someone broad beans’ (NKPP *bób* 4), *dać/zadać komu tabaki*, lit. ‘to give someone some snuff’ (NKPP *tabaka* 15), *dać kminu (z ziegielem)*, lit. ‘to give cumin (with angelica)’ (NKPP *kmin*).

Symbols. Pepper is a common symbol of sharp taste, therefore it is associated with malice, insult, obscenity, vulgarity, destruction, folly, etc., which is particularly evident in its numerous derivatives, obscene in usage, such as *pieprznąć* ‘to hit or throw’, *pieprznięty* ‘crazy, loony’, *pieprzyć się* ‘to screw’, *spieprzyć* ‘to screw up’, etc.

As an expensive spice from distant lands, pepper also was a sign of wealth and refinement (Wisła 1890/13, NKPP *pieprzno* 2).

The definition of *pieprz* proposed below is maximally extended, because it includes all (or nearly all) of the positive culturally relevant characteristics of

⁴⁹ *Octu z pieprzem, imbirem i solą wlać mu po grzeble do gardła, bydlę wywróciwszy, a potem z nim przy powrozie biegać.*

⁵⁰ ... *kminu polnego, włożyć im w napój, także i żużel od kowala albo proch od ślusarza; masła z pieprzem zmieszawszy, zadać im na tę dolegliwość.*

pepper. Pepper turns out to be not only a sharp-bitter spice, once expensive and highly desirable, but also an agent with numerous healing and magical uses. In a condensed form, the definition could look like this:

[NAMES]	<i>pieprz</i> 'pepper', <i>corny korzyń</i> 'black root'
[CATEGORIZATIONS]	a spice, a root
[COMPLEXES AND COLLECTIONS]	it is associated with products with an intense, often spicy taste and/or smell, among others salt, saffron, snuff, with dishes to which it is added, including fish and meat (pork), with vodka
[OPPOSITIONS]	it is contrasted with sweet products, sugar and honey, as well as the finer and milder-tasting poppy
[APPEARANCE AND PROPERTIES]	its grains are small, spherical, black/brown; it is dry; it has a sharp-bitter taste
[LOCATION]	it grows in far off countries with hot climates
[PUCHASE AND PRICE]	it is bought in town, in the spice store, from a street vendor or a Jew; it is expensive
[PROCESSING]	before use, its grains are often pestled, milled, or ground to powder
[STORAGE]	it is kept in a special can or dish, the so-called <i>pieprzniczka</i> 'pepper pot'
[PEPPER AS A SPICE]	it is used to season meat, soups, sauerkraut, etc., added to ritual bread, <i>piernik</i> 'cake with honey and spices', and vodka
[EFFECTS OF EATING PEPPER]	after eating, it burns, pinches in the mouth and increases thirst, irritates the nose and causes sneezing; it is warming and stimulating; it causes anxiety, irritability, anger
[MAGICAL USES]	as a magical agent, it is given on Christmas Day to a dog to make it angry; it is sprinkled on cattle so that it can be sold faster; witches sow it to bring hail
[MEDICINAL USES]	it helps in problems with the stomach, abdomen, throat, teeth, coughing, tuberculosis, fever, women's infertility
[EQUIVALENCES]	it occurs interchangeably with other products that are bitter-tasting (hops, wormwood, chicory, bile); irritating to the senses (salt); dry (horseradish, salt, snuff, wooden chips)
[SYMBOLS]	it functions as a symbol of sharpness (and, indirectly, of malice, obscenity, vulgarity, destruction, etc.); in the past it was a sign of wealth and refinement

Derivatives of the word *pieprz* deserve a separate analysis, as most of them belong to the "canon" of Polish vulgarisms and swear words. The explication above says that because of the intense sharp-bitter taste of a pepper grain, the word *pieprz* has become the basis for numerous derivatives that connote such features as malice, insult, obscenity, vulgarity, destruction, stupidity,

etc. Is this, however, motivated just by the taste of the spice or are there any other reasons for this wealth of expressively marked “peppery” words in contemporary Polish?⁵¹ Is the use of such words as *pieprznik* ‘mess’ or *zapieprz* ‘hard, exhausting work’ still associated with pepper? Or is this relationship already obsolete; so that new derivatives (or new meanings of old ones) are based only on the “unsavoury reputation” of the previous ones? The basis for the majority of the derivatives is the verb *pieprzyć*, which, according to Andrzej Bańkowski, is “the greatest word today; one that, out of the Polish love for pepper, is ‘universal’ and can replace any other” (Bań ES 2/556). The contemporary verb *pieprzyć* has rich connotations but many of them have appeared in Polish only in the last few decades.

Lin SJP (1811) notes only the basic meaning of the verb *pieprzyć* ‘to season with pepper’. In Zdan SJP (1861), there is one literal and one figurative meaning, based on the then high price of pepper: ‘to sprinkle, to season with pepper, to add pepper’ and (fig.) ‘to value highly’.

In the verb’s basic meaning, Karł SJP (1908) additionally includes some metaphorical contexts: *pieprzyć mowę/opowiadanie* ‘to make one’s speech/story “peppery”, to strew it with pornographic elements, vulgar words’; *pieprzyć* (fig.) ‘to set a high price for sth’.

In addition, Karł SJP also lists the verb *pieprzyć się*, lit. ‘to pepper each other’, i.e. ‘to copulate’. Interestingly, although the dictionary does use the qualifier *figurative* elsewhere, in this case it tags the verb as *common* (Polish *gminny*), defined as 1. ‘belonging to the rural commune’; 2. ‘folk’; or 3. (fig.) ‘rough, vulgar’.

In Dor SJP (1964), *pieprzyć* no longer means ‘to value highly’: pepper had already become an easily available and cheap product. However, there are two meanings qualified as *vulgar* (the dictionary does not record *pieprzyć się*): 1. ‘to add pepper to dishes, to season a dish with pepper’; 2. ‘to tell obscene, vulgar jokes’; 3a. (vulgar) ‘to have sexual intercourse, screw’; b. ‘to scold someone; to talk nonsense’.

In Zgół PSWP (2012), there appear other meanings qualified as colloquial: *pieprzyć* 1. ‘to add pepper, to season a dish with pepper (a spice obtained from the fruit of the black pepper plant) or with a similar spice’; 2. *colloq.* ‘telling nonsense or lies’; 3. *vulgar* ‘about a man: to have sexual

⁵¹ A preliminary survey of other languages, such as Russian, French, German or English, suggests that those contains fewer and less vulgar words in this category, e.g. German *pfeffern* (infml = *heftig werfen*) ‘to fling’, as in *jemandem eine pfeffern* ‘to clout sb one’ (www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/german-english/pfeffern; access March 1, 2018); English *to pepper (with)* (infml) ‘to hit repeatedly, especially with small shots’ or ‘to cause to appear repeatedly in’ (*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*).

intercourse, screw'; 4. *colloq.* 'to treat someone or something with contempt, to express disdain or hostility, not to be interested'; 5. *colloq.* 'to do something carelessly'. The dictionary also notes: *ja (cię) pieprzę*, lit. 'I pepper (you)', 'an exclamation expressing admiration, astonishment, more rarely reluctance', and as many as five meanings of the verb *pieprzyć się*: 1. *vulgar* 'to have sexual intercourse, screw'; 2. *colloq.* 'to stop working properly'; 3. *colloq.* 'to feel intimidated, have reservations or doubts'; 4. *colloq.* 'to show someone too much attention or respect'; 5. *colloq.* 'to do something for too long, with effort'. Moreover, Zgół PSWP mentions for the first time the verbs *pieprznąć* and *pieprznąć się*:⁵²

pieprznąć – 1. *colloq.* 'to throw something with a lot of power, usually under the influence of negative emotions'; 2. *colloq.* 'to hit someone or something with considerable force'; 3. *colloq.* 'to take someone else's property'; 4. *colloq.* 'to make a loud, violent sound, to explode'; 5. *colloq.* 'to end suddenly, to be destroyed, to cease to exist'; 6. *colloq.* 'to stop doing something, give up something'; 7. *colloq.* 'to say something very decisively, boldly'; 8. *colloq.* 'to say something without thinking, to say something unbecoming or unwise';

pieprznąć się – 1. *colloq.* 'to hit hard against something'; 2. *colloq.* 'to make a mistake, to do something wrong'; 3. *colloq.* 'to sit or lie down on something with force, with all of one's weight'.

In the most recent, online dictionary Żmig WSJP (the date of entry modification: 2013) there are no new meanings of *pieprzyć* and *pieprznąć* (it lacks *pieprzyć się* and *pieprznąć się*. What is more, the dictionary does not even list some of the meanings recorded in Zgół PSWP):

pieprzyć – 1. 'to add pepper for better taste'; 2. *colloq.* 'to say something stupid or untrue'; 3. *colloq.* 'to treat someone or something with disrespect'; 4. *vulgar* 'of a man: to have sex with someone'; 5. 'to do what you are obliged to do badly, so that it leads to bad results'; *pieprznąć* – 1. *colloq.* 'to hit'; 2. *colloq.* 'to throw something with force'; 3. *colloq.* 'to fall over'; 4. *colloq.* 'to explode'; 5. *colloq.* 'to break down'.

The above definitions, listed chronologically, show the development of the meanings of the word *pieprzyć* (later also *pieprzyć się*, *pieprznąć* and *pieprznąć się*). Disregarding the already obsolete 'to value highly', the meanings that may be considered the most "primary" are those associated with the sexual sphere, with telling nonsense or lies, and with insulting someone. Later meanings are to a certain degree derived from those and include disregard, doing something carelessly or spoiling something. There are also some meanings whose motivation is unclear, e.g. exaggerated care for someone or feeling intimidated. Perhaps they are related to the fact

⁵² These are the verbs *pieprzyć* and its reflexive form *pieprzyć się* in perfective aspect. [trans. note]

that usually only a moderate amount of pepper is added to dishes, as not everyone likes spicy food.

Thus *pieprzyć* has become more diverse but at the same time less distinct in terms of meaning; the context is often the only clue that allows for deducing which meanings are evoked in a given case. Despite that, the expressiveness of the verb has not diminished: the item can convey various emotions, not only negative ones, in a straightforward manner, as is the case with the popular exclamation *ja (cię) pieprzę*, which can express ‘admiration, surprise, more rarely reluctance’ (Zgół PSWP). According to Maciej Grochowski, *ja pieprzę* and *ja cię pieprzę* qualify as expletives, or lexical units with the help of which the speaker can spontaneously reveal their emotions towards something or someone without providing any information⁵³ (Groch SPiW 17). According to Jadwiga Kowalikowa, the frequent use of *pieprzyć* has even led to its devulgarisation:

Devulgarisation, or the disappearance of vulgarity or obscenity in an item, is caused by frequent use of that item. The process is analogous to the weakening of a lexeme’s expressiveness. The stigma of vulgarity is lost especially in euphemisms – this is something that the users of such salient substitutes of “coarse” terms are often unaware of. As a result, they do not feel embarrassed when they use them. Among the verbs that have lost their vulgarity is *pieprzyć* and its derivatives: their vulgar, obscene aspect has almost been lost nowadays in the expression *ale jaja!*, lit. ‘what balls!’, i.e. ‘bugger me!’ or *robić (sobie) jaja*, lit. ‘to make balls’, i.e. ‘to make fun of sb/sth’. The same will soon happen to the verb *olewać*, lit. ‘piss on sth/sb’, i.e. ‘not to give a damn for’. [...] Younger speakers often emphasize the fact that they use various “coarse, scabrous” expressions for fun, without noticing their vulgarity and obscenity. (Kowalikowa 2008: 86–87)

Kowalikowa’s conclusions regarding *pieprzyć* are debatable. It appears that for most language users, the verb continues to function as a vulgarism, although it is certainly “softer” than *pierdolić*⁵⁴ or *jebać* ‘to fuck’, and closer to *chrzanić*, lit. ‘to horseradish’, or *pierniczyć*, lit. ‘to act with a honey-and-pepper cake’, i.e. ‘to talk nonsense’ or ‘to spoil’. What is more, the borderline status of *pieprzyć* on the verge of “good taste” seems very attractive to speakers, as can be seen in contemporary Internet “demotivators”⁵⁵, which

⁵³ Grochowski’s claim that expletives are phrases that do not carry any information is questioned by the authors of the Dictionary of Real Polish (*Słownik polszczyzny rzeczywistej*), for whom both expletives and vulgarisms have a communicative character (janKomunikant 2011: 10–33).

⁵⁴ In Anna Dąbrowska’s Dictionary of Euphemisms (*Słownik eufemizmów*), *pieprzyć (się)* is said to refer to sexual intercourse or rape and is treated as a vulgar euphemism that “is a kind of softening as it replaces a very vulgar word”, that vulgar word being *pierdolić (się)* ‘to fuck’ (Dąbr SEP 98).

⁵⁵ According to (the Polish version of) Wikipedia, a demotivator is “a demotivating picture, a combination of a telling picture or photograph with a caption com-

contain wordplay based on the different meanings of *pieprzyć*. One example is a dialogue between a pepper pot and a salt cellar. The salt cellar says: *Pieprz się!* ‘Pepper you!/Screw you!’, to which the pepper pot replies: *Kiedys mi za to słono zapłacisz!* ‘You’ll pay me saltily/dearly for that one day!’.⁵⁶ Another demotivator shows a hugging couple and a caption: *Jeśli wszystko się pieprzy, to pieprz to... i chodź się pieprzyć* ‘If everything is going wrong [peppers itself], don’t give a damn [pepper it]... and let’s have sex [let’s pepper]’.⁵⁷ Yet another picture presents a Communist party meeting, during which one of the members says: *My name is Fighter [Walczak], I have been fighting [walczyłem] and I will continue to fight [będę walczył]!*. Another member follows suit: *My name is Pepper [Pieprz]*... but is silenced by the chairman: *Sit down, comrade, sit down*.⁵⁸

The popularity and ambiguity of the verb *pieprzyć* is also transferred to its numerous prefixal derivatives,⁵⁹ which also qualify as vulgarisms: *dopieprzyć (się)*, *napieprzyć (się)*, *naopieprzać (się)*, *nawpieprzać (się)*, *odpieprzyć (się)*, *opieprzyć (się)*, *podpieprzyć*, *popieprzyć (się)*, *przepieprzyć*, *przypieprzyć (się)*, *rozpieprzyć (się)*, *spieprzyć (się)*, *upieprzyć (się)*, *wpieprzyć (się)*, *wypieprzyć (się)*, *zapieprzyć*. As in the case of *pieprzyć*, the meanings of most of them have changed over the years. Let the verb *opieprzyć*, lit. ‘to about-pepper’, serve as an example (the label *vulg.* in these sources stands for ‘common, unrefined’):

opieprzyć

1. to sprinkle with pepper, to season; 2. *fig.* to season with bitterness; 3. *fig. vulg.* to buy or sell sth at a high price (Zdan SJP)

1. to sprinkle, season with pepper; 2. *fig.* *opieprzyć* to reprimand (someone); 3. *fig.* to make bitter, to poison; 4. *fig.* to buy or sell something at a high price, to overpay; 5. *fig.* to exaggerate, to overdo (Karl SJP)

1. to sprinkle, season with pepper, *fig.* to season with greasy, ambiguous jokes; 2. *vulg.* to berate, to scold; 3. *older* to scar, to hurt (Dor SJP)

1. *colloq.* to sprinkle, season with pepper; 2. *colloq.* to berate someone for something (Zgół PSWP)

opieprzyć/opieprzać się

1. *vulg.* to berate each other; 2. *vulg.* to idle away (SJP PWN)

menting on its content. A demotivator usually has an ironic or cynical character” (<https://pl.wikipedia.org/Demotywartor>, accessed July 7, 2017).

⁵⁶ <https://kwejk.pl/obrazek/1628977/pieprz-sie.html> (accessed July 7, 2017).

⁵⁷ <http://iqkartka.pl/kartka/14636.html> (accessed July 7, 2017)

⁵⁸ <http://demotywartory.pl/4646623/Tak-bylo> (accessed July 7, 2017)

⁵⁹ A separate analysis should be devoted to the derivatives of the adjective *pierny* (Old Polish *pierzny*, from *pierz* ‘pepper’), which also function as vulgarisms, e.g. *pierniczyć*, *opierniczyć*, *popierniczyć*, *przypierniczyć*, *rozpierniczyć*, *spierniczyć* etc.

Some of the prefixal derivatives are relatively new (not recorded in Zdan SJP, Karł SJP, Dor SJP), but with many meanings already, as in the case of *wpieprzać*:

wpieprzać

1. to eat a lot, quickly and not very elegantly; 2. to beat someone, to punish physically;

wpieprzać się

1. to interfere in other people's affairs; 2. to be in a troublesome situation, in an unfavourable position (Zgól PSWP)

wpieprzyć/wpieprzać

1. *vulg.* to eat something; 2. *vulg.* to put something somewhere; 3. *vulg.* to make someone accept or buy something against their will; 4. *vulg.* to help create a difficult situation; 5. *vulg.* to beat somebody; 6. *vulg.* to make someone angry or irritated; 7. *vulg.* to put someone in a place against their will

wpieprzyć się [PEFR] – *wpieprzać się* [IMPEFR]

1. *vulg.* to interfere in someone else's affairs; 2. *vulg.* to interfere in someone's conversation; 3. *vulg.* to collide with something; 4. *vulg.* to enter somewhere without consent; 5. *vulg.* to find oneself in a difficult situation as a result of making a wrong decision (SJP PWN)

Among the derivatives are also those that so far have not been recorded in dictionaries but are already in common use, e.g. *upieprzyć* 'to bite', 'to make dirty', 'to tease', or 'to work very hard', and can be found in the National Corpus of Polish:

*Jak szłam nad jezioro, to mnie osa **upieprzyła** w małego palca u nogi, i mnie cholernie boli.*

'As I was walking to the lake, a wasp **stung** my little toe, and it hurts me a lot.'

*Dopiero po chwili zorientował się, gdzie spędził noc. Sufit mocno ugięty, podłoga powyginana, a łóżko, na którym leżał, zasrane przez kury. Babcine kury. Nie, nie **upieprzył się**, bo kupy były zaschnięte.*

'It took him a while to realise where he had spent the night. The ceiling was sagging strongly, the floor was uneven, and the bed he was lying on was covered with chicken shit. Grandma's chickens. No, he didn't **get dirty** because the droppings were dry.'

*Spytałem go, jak on to robi, że tylu ludzi przychodzi na jego imieniny. On mi na to odpowiedział: Panie Janie, pan nawet nie wie, jak to się trzeba **upieprzyć**, żeby tak było.*

'I asked him how he made so many people come to his name-day party. He replied: Jan, you don't even realise how I have to **drudge** to make it happen.'

*Nigdzie nie widać informacji, jak wypełniać przekazy i чеки. Starszy mężczyzna kończy już wypisywanie po raz drugi swego blankietu: – Ile teraz zniszczymy papieru, ile czasu zmarnujemy, bo tym paniom nie chciało się wypisać kartki z informacją dla ludzi! Wszystko robią, żeby człowieka **upieprzyć**.*

'Nowhere is there any information on how to fill in money transfer forms and cheques. An elderly man is already finishing writing his form a second time: "How much paper and time is wasted just because these ladies would not put up a notice with some information for people! They're doing everything to **get a man into trouble**.'

Undoubtedly, the meanings of prefixal derivatives of the verb *pieprzyć* derive from both the meanings of their roots and those of the prefixes.⁶⁰ However, as in this study, my main concern is the root morpheme, I disregard the meanings of individual prefixes and present below all the “peppery” verbs – including *pieprzyć* – grouped according to their present-day meanings.⁶¹ This should demonstrate how coherent this group of verbs is.

TO HAVE SEXUAL INTERCOURSE, TO SCREW

pieprzyć (‘to pepper’) – ‘to have sexual intercourse, screw’ (SJP PWN); ‘of a man: to have sexual intercourse, screw’ (Zgół PSWP)
pieprzyć się (‘to pepper oneself/each other’⁶²) – ‘to have sexual intercourse, screw’ (Zgół PSWP)
przepieprzyć (‘to pepper through’) – ‘of a man: to have sexual intercourse with, screw someone’ (Zgół PSWP)
wypieprzyć (‘to pepper out’) – ‘to have sexual intercourse with, screw’ (Zgół PSWP); ‘of a man: to have sexual intercourse with, screw’ (SJP PWN)

TO TALK BULLSHIT, TELL LIES OR NONSENSE; TO SAY SOMETHING MALICIOUS, UNPLEASANT; TO CRITICISE OR SCOLD SOMEONE

pieprzyć – ‘to talk nonsense or lies’ (Zgół PSWP); ‘to talk nonsense’ (SJP PWN)
pieprznąć (‘to pepper’-PERF) – ‘to say something without thinking, to say something unbecoming or silly’, ‘to say something very decisively, boldly’ (Zgół PSWP)
napieprzyć (‘to pepper a lot’) – ‘to talk a lot of nonsense etc.’ (SJP PWN)
dopieprzyć (‘to pepper at (sb)’) – ‘to say something malicious or unpleasant to someone’ (Zgół PSWP); ‘to strongly criticise someone’ (SJP PWN)
dopieprzyć się (‘to pepper oneself at (sb)’) – ‘to criticise someone, especially in an unjustified way’ (SJP PWN)
przypieprzyć (‘to pepper once’) – ‘to raise objections to someone/something, to have a grudge against someone, to turn to someone with critical remarks, often unjustified’ (Zgół PSWP)

⁶⁰ Renata Przybylska explains: “Activation of a given meaning of a prefix is correlated with many factors: (a) the meaning of the verb base; (b) the syntactic pattern represented by a given prefixal verb, i.e. the number of arguments opened by that verb, the grammatical form of possible complements, the way they are filled by lexical items from specific semantic classes; (c) the use of implicit information; (d) implications concerning the state preceding the change (the state that is always indicated by the semantics of the prefix); (e) the paradigmatic relations *in absentia* between the prefixed verb and other verbs with the same base but with different prefixes; (f) the relative degree of entrenchment of a given contextual meaning of the prefix in the semantic structure of the language, manifested, among others, by its frequency in texts” (Przybylska 2006: 282–283).

⁶¹ That is to say, the meanings recorded in dictionaries. Two dictionaries are used for the purpose, Zgół PSWP and SJP PWN, since they contain most of the verbs in question, with their most current meanings.

⁶² The Polish reflexive particle *się* is ambiguous between these meanings and in fact each of the two contributes to the semantics of this verb. [trans. note]

naopieprzać ('to pepper (sb) about'-IMPERF) – 'to scold someone many times or badly' (SJP PWN)

naupieprzać ('to pepper in continuously') – 'to scold someone many times or badly' (SJP PWN)

opieprzyć ('to pepper (sb) about'-PERF) – 'to scold someone for something' (Zgół PSWP)

opieprzyć się ('to pepper each other about') – 'to scold each other for something' (Zgół PSWP)

TO TREAT SOMEONE/SOMETHING WITH CONTEMPT, DISDAIN; TO TEASE SOMEONE, TO PICK ON SOMEONE; TO INTERFERE, TO IMPOSE ONESELF/ONE'S WILL

pieprzyć – 'to regard someone or something with contempt or hostility, to express contempt or hostility towards, not to be interested' (Zgół PSWP)

przypieprzyć ('to pepper once') – 'to tease someone' (SJP PWN)

przypieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself to sb') – 'to impose one's company on someone' (SJP PWN)

dopieprzyć się ('to pepper at (sb)') – 'not to give someone a break, to pick on someone or something, to tamper with someone or something' (Zgół PSWP); 'to be importunate' (SJP PWN)

wpieprzyć ('to pepper into') – 'to put someone in a place against their will'; 'to make someone accept or buy something against their will' (SJP PWN)

wpieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself into') – 'to interfere in someone else's affairs', 'to interfere in someone's conversation', 'to enter somewhere without somebody's permission' (SJP PWN)

but:

odpieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself off') – 'to bugger off; to leave someone alone or in peace, to stop interfering' (Zgół PSWP)

TO BEAT SOMEONE; TO HIT ONESELF/SOMEONE WITH FORCE

pieprznąć ('to pepper'-PERF) – 'to hit someone or something with force' (Zgół PSWP)

pieprznąć się ('to pepper oneself'-PERF) – 'to hit oneself very hard' (SJP PWN)

przypieprzyć ('to pepper once') – 'to hit somebody/something' (Zgół PSWP)

dopieprzyć ('to pepper at (sb)') – 'to beat someone severely' (Zgół PSWP)

napieprzyć ('to pepper a lot') – 'to beat someone badly' (SJP PWN)

napieprzyć się ('to pepper each other a lot') – 'to beat each other badly' (SJP PWN)

wpieprzyć ('to pepper into (sb)') – 'to beat someone' (SJP PWN)

wpieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself into') – 'to collide with something' (SJP PWN)

zapieprzyć ('to pepper (sb) once') – 'to hit someone' (SJP PWN)

similarly:

napieprzać ('to pepper continuously') – 'to hurt (cause pain)' (SJP PWN)

TO THROW, TO THROW OUT/AWAY; TO TIP OVER, TO FALL

pieprznąć ('to pepper'-PERF) – 'to throw something with force, usually under the influence of negative emotions' (Zgół PSWP), 'to tip over/fall' (SJP PWN)

pieprznąć się ('to pepper oneself'-PERF) – 'to sit on something or lie down with force, using one's entire weight' (Zgół PSWP)
wypieprzyć ('to pepper out') – 'to throw out/away, to get rid of someone or something' (Zgół PSWP); 'to tip over/fall' (SJP PWN)
spieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself down') – 'to fall from some height' (SJP PWN)
wpieprzyć ('to pepper into') – 'to place something somewhere' (SJP PWN)
nawpieprzać ('to pepper in many things') – 'to throw a lot of things somewhere' (SJP PWN)
rozpieprzyć ('to pepper around') – 'to scatter something in different places' (SJP PWN)

similarly:

pieprznąć ('to pepper'-PERF) – 'to make a loud, violent sound, to explode' (Zgół PSWP)

TO SPOIL, DESTROY, WASTE; TO LOSE SOMETHING, TO GIVE UP

pieprznąć ('to pepper'-PERF) – 'to stop suddenly, to be destroyed, to cease to exist'; 'to stop doing something, to give up something' (Zgół PSWP)
pieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself') – 'to stop working properly' (Zgół PSWP)
rozpieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself around') – 'to break, be destroyed as a result of an impact; to get damaged during an accident' (Zgół PSWP)
spieprzyć się ('to pepper down') – 'to change for worse or to break completely' (SJP PWN)
przepieprzyć ('to pepper through') – 'to waste some time, not to use time properly'; 'to lose or spend money, to lose one's property/assets' (Zgół PSWP); 'to spend money recklessly' (SJP PWN)

TO MAKE AN ERROR, TO CONFUSE SOMETHING, TO MAKE A MESS

pieprznąć się ('to pepper oneself'-PERF) – 'to make an error' (SJP PWN)
popieprzyć ('to pepper about') – 'to confuse something or make a mess in something' (SJP PWN)
popieprzyć się ('to pepper itself about'-PERF) – 'to result in confusion or complication' (SJP PWN)

TO DO SOMETHING IN A WRONG WAY, CARELESSLY OR FOR A LONG TIME; TO NEGLECT ONE'S DUTIES, TO IDLE AWAY

pieprzyć – 'to do something carelessly' (Zgół PSWP)
pieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself'-IMPERF) – 'to do something for too long, with an effort' (Zgół PSWP); 'to do something for too long, too meticulously' (SJP PWN)
pieprznąć się ('to pepper oneself'-PERF) – 'to make an error, to do something in a wrong way' (Zgół PSWP)
odpieprzyć ('to pepper away') – 'to do something hastily, carelessly' (Zgół PSWP); 'to do something carelessly, so as to do it faster' (SJP PWN)
spieprzyć ('to pepper off') – 'to do something in a wrong way, carelessly or inefficiently' (SJP PWN)
zapieprzyć ('to pepper (sth) once') – 'to neglect something' (Zgół PSWP)
opieprzać się ('to pepper oneself about') – 'to idle away' (SJP PWN); 'to do nothing, to neglect all duties, to hang around, to laze' (Zgół PSWP)
naopieprzać się ('to pepper oneself about for a long time') – 'to spend a lot of time idly' (SJP PWN)

TO EAT MUCH, FAST, IN A MESSY WAY

wpieprzać ('to pepper in') – 'to eat a lot, quickly, and not very elegantly' (Zgół PSWP);
 'to eat something' (SJP PWN)
nawpieprzać się ('to pepper in to the fullest') – 'to eat a lot' (SJP PWN)

TO PUT SOMEONE OR FIND ONESELF IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION

wpieprzyć ('to pepper in'-PERF) – 'to contribute a situation that is difficult for someone' (SJP PWN)
wpieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself in') – 'to find oneself in a difficult situation as a result of making a bad decision' (SJP PWN); 'to be in an embarrassing situation, in an unfavourable position' (Zgół PSWP)

TO RUN AWAY

spieprzyć ('to pepper off'-PERF) – 'to run away from someone or something quickly' (Zgół PSWP); 'to move away from somewhere very quickly' (SJP PWN)
napieprzać ('to pepper intensely') – 'to run away' (SJP PWN)

TO STEAL

pieprznąć ('to pepper'-PERF) – 'to take someone else's property' (Zgół PSWP)
podpieprzyć ('to pepper under') – 'to steal, take someone else's property' (Zgół PSWP)
zapieprzyć ('to pepper (sth) once') – 'to steal something' (Zgół PSWP)

The above grouping is, obviously, conventional and there are some meanings that cannot be assigned to any of the categories, e.g.:

odpieprzyć ('to pepper off') – 'to spend a certain period of time in a certain place' (Zgół PSWP)
odpieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself off') – 'to dress up' (SJP PWN)
pieprzyć się ('to pepper oneself') – 'to feel intimidated, to have scruples or doubts'; 'to value or respect someone too much' (Zgół PSWP)

Despite these exceptions, it can be stated that these verbs constitute a semantically coherent group: they chiefly express activities that are sudden, intense, destructive, offensive, immoral, etc. Therefore, I believe that the initial question of how much pepper (as a spice) has remained in the contemporary, expressively marked derivatives of the Polish word *pieprz*, can be answered: a lot. The cognitive definition of pepper proposed here suggests that eating this bitter and burning spice has a warming, stimulating, irritating effect, may cause anxiety, anger and consequently, lead to violent, unpredictable, usually unpleasant behaviour. It is such behaviour that most derivatives of the Polish word *pieprz* refer, directly or indirectly. Since Poles like both pepper and vivid, blunt language, there is more and more *pieprzność* 'pepperness' in contemporary Polish. It is also worth noting that the word *pieprz* contains the plosive [p] and the hard fricative [ʃ], sounds that contribute to its expressiveness.

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